

## St Pius & St Anthony 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year B2

There is one in every group. A self-appointed sheriff, charging in on everything to boss and throw their weight around. I can think of a pushy know-it-all kid in my cub scout troop that thought he was the automatic stand-in for the scoutmaster anytime he left the room. Or in my 4<sup>th</sup> grade school, I had a classmate that presumed to be the 'bathroom monitor' and was quick to report any thing to the teacher after recess break (*like he'd say, "Mrs Taylor, Tony was about to talk to Scott, I saw it"*). Well, it turns out from the gospel today, that the apostles had two of them in their group, James and John (Barney Fife Apostles!) And they are trying to grasp at power in our reading. I give them credit for being BOLD. They are that! In fact, scandalously so! Mark 10:35 describes them as presuming so arrogantly as to **demand**, "Teacher, we *want you to do for us whatever* we ask of you." Of course, we have a patient teacher, and so Jesus gently entertains their request, asking for more details from them. He hears them out. But notice what they ask for. We might expect good apostles to ask for such things as "Jesus, can we schedule some additional healing events for you so that we can more efficiently heal greater numbers of people?" Or they could ask Jesus, "Could we have some days off from missionary work so we can volunteer more hours down at the Synagogue Tutoring Program for learning disabled children?" But, no, they don't ask anything like that remotely close to helping other people. They are only thinking of themselves, and as a power grab they ask for the 'seats of glory' from Jesus to sit beside him when He takes His throne in the Kingdom! They want to be his 'right hand' and 'left hand' man. His 'strong arms' (Psalms 89:14, & 118:16-17) (*and talk about greed for power, they want to establish a Zebedee family dynasty, since they ask for both positions –a takeover move now and establish succession!*)

I suspect such brash behavior is why Jesus nicknamed them, 'Sons of Thunder' (Mark 3:17). Why? Because you knew when they are around. They leave a heavy footprint. You can count on them to bring the fireworks to everything. Today's example shows that they don't hesitate to strike and seize power at any opportunity. Recall that we just heard couple weeks ago, in Mark 9:38 that this same 'John' showed he was very willing to intimidate others to maintain a monopoly in ministry. Back then, he announced to Jesus that when he (he says in Mk 9:38, '**we**' so was the other one, James?), when they saw someone casting demons out in Jesus' name, John stopped the man and shut him down 'because he does not follow us'. They were cornering the exorcism market-attack the competition, muscling them out of the neighborhood. And also, our tradition holds that this same John writes the Book of Revelation (a rough and tumble

book), which uses the word 'Thunder' 10 times, when that word is only used two other times in all of the NT (one of the times here in Mark 3:17, and then again only one time in John 12:29 to reference God the Father speaking like 'thunder').

But of all examples, I think their audacious behavior is most on display when in Luke 9:54, they learn that a Samaritan town has rejected the apostles' advance missionary approach. After the rejection, James and John (Luke 9:54) ask Jesus if He wants them to call down 'fire' from heaven (lightning and thunder!) to destroy that town. Of course, Jesus the Prince of Peace resists all of these abuses of authority, and offers the counter example of true Christian leadership and tells them basically to 'shake the dust off' and move on, as there is way too much good to be done than to waste energy in a vendetta. But, Jesus always displays that such genuine Christian Authority. It is constructive service and helpful redemption for others instead of devilish wrecking ball destruction. Power is not seen in the blowing up of things, but rather it is seen in the building & holding things together

But we don't want to single out James and John for their distorted values, of grabbing for power like the world would, because notice that Mark (10:41) says that when the rest of them, the '**other ten**' apostles, learn of what James/John asked Jesus (*they had to have tattler for them to learn of it*), Mark says, "they became **indignant** at James and John." Why? They are acting same as James & John, and are only mad because James/John beat them to the 'ask'. They pushed to the front of the line ahead of them! They were outsmarted, or so they think. But Jesus sees this as a 'teaching opportunity' for all of them (and us), a chance to teach how a true Christian leads and holds any authority ('Christ-like'). We all can learn from Jesus' leadership style, as the drive for control or will to power rises easily enough in our fallen human nature. How did the 1980's band Tears for Fears sing it but, "*Ev-ry-bo-dy wants to rule the world*"!

Jesus tells us. Christians, in His Name, must be different. Don't be like Herod. Don't be like Pilate. Don't be like Caiaphas, the Priest. Don't be like the Pharisees. Christians must see any authority they have as an empowerment to serve. The strong leader works harder to serve/help and meet the needs of those under them. He/she doesn't stand on them, but he/she lifts them up, letting them stand on him/her if needed. Jesus is saying, "Don't be abusive about any authority you have (Leave that to Pilate!). He says it is the Gentiles that 'lord their authority over others' and make their authority 'felt' (Mk 10:42). By saying 'felt'. Jesus means that you 'feel it' you know, when it is a grab, as they push, pull and the pressure they exert won't a 'pinch' but a 'vise' feel. Jesus is adamant is saying, "it

shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all (Mk 10:43-44) The Christian leader serves. It is as simple as that. The Christian leader asks the question, "How can I help? Not "How can I use them, or what can I get out of them." Notice how gracious a leader He is, even to ask further clarification from James and John after their offensive push on Him ('The Master is known by His restraint'). Jesus' response was, "What do you wish [me] to do for you?" (Mk 10:36) He is saying, 'How may I help you?' when they bullyingly approach Him. Of course, Jesus humbly responds, 'Oh that is not mine to give, I came only to do the Will of the Father, I serve the Father's glory not my own!' That is Christian Power, to be able to humbly serve someone other than one-self, to have such control of one's own self to be able to truly help another. Jesus that model of service. As master, He will wash the feet of His disciples. As Master, He will not ask anything of His subjects that He Himself won't do Himself. He lays down His own life, that others may live. And He asks us, His followers to do the same. We need to serve, as He serves.